



INDUSTRY CIRCULAR

DEPARTMENT OF
THE TREASURY

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, D. C. 20226

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METHANOL CONTAMINATION IN ITALIAN WINES

TO: WHOLESALERS AND IMPORTERS OF WINE AND OTHERS CONCERNED:

As you may already know, the Italian Government has disclosed that lethal amounts of methanol have been found in Italian wines, and its ingestion has contributed to 20 deaths in Italy. Lacking any evidence or real assurances from the Italian Government that no methanol contaminated Italian wine has been exported to the United States, ATF, as a precautionary measure, has placed a U.S. embargo on all Italian wine shipments pending the issuance of Italian certificates of analysis attesting to safe levels of methanol in Italian wines. These certificates of analysis will be issued by testing laboratories in Italy which have been certified by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture. Future shipments of all Italian wines will require this certificate of analysis prior to their release from Customs Custody.

In order to ensure that Italian wines already released from Customs Custody have not been contaminated with unsafe levels of methanol, all importers and wholesalers of Italian wines are advised to refrain from selling Italian wines until they have had each brand of wine in their inventory tested by a commercial laboratory and certified as having a safe level of methanol. It is also their responsibility to contact their retail customers and instruct them to withhold the sale of their Italian wines pending verification by laboratory analysis of safe levels of methanol in these wines. A safe level has been set by ATF to be 0.1% of methanol by volume of wine, per advice of the Food and Drug Administration. Copies of all laboratory analyses on Italian wines should be sent to ATF's Alcohol Import-Export Branch, P.O. Box 385 Washington, DC 20044-0385. If laboratory analysis discloses unsafe levels of Methanol, you are to notify ATF immediately at (202) 535-6245 for instructions as to the disposition of the wine. Under no circumstances should this methanol contaminated wine be sold.

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Italian wines found to contain unsafe levels of methanol are considered by ATF to be mislabeled and not eligible for sale in the United States. Therefore, any wholesaler or importer who conducts transactions in any Italian wines on or after the date of this circular, without having all brands tested for safe levels of methanol, and whose wines are subsequently found to contain methanol in excess of 0.1% by volume, will be considered by ATF to be in willful violation of the FAA Act and subject to suspension or revocation of their FAA Basic Permit.

Any person having questions concerning the laboratory analysis procedures required by this Industry Circular should contact ATF's National Laboratory Center in Rockville, Maryland at (301) 294-0410.

Upon receipt of this Industry Circular, you are instructed to notify immediately by letter, ATF's Regional Office that you have received a copy of this circular and advise them if you are a wholesaler or importer of Italian wines. This information will assist us in establishing a list for the purpose of follow-up inspections.


Director